

Creating a Web Site That Helps Sales

By David A. Macchia

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A decade ago, insurance and financial services companies promised increased sales, easier servicing, and stronger client relationships if advisers signed up for company-sponsored agent-branded Web sites.

Today, if planners, brokers, and agents were asked whether or not those earlier Web sites or even their current Web site actually generate sales leads or make it any easier to service clients, they usually say, "Not really."

It doesn't have to be this way. In fact, the following basic tips will help the producer avoid having an ordinary Web site and instead help him or her offer clients and prospects a site that helps solve problems.

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It's Not All About the Producer

Let's face it. Most of the agent-branded Web sites out there are all about the producer. That seems like it makes sense, but with the incredible effect that the Internet can have on clients and prospects, why should the producer focus his site on everyday "brochure ware"?

Most sites feature the producer, his or her experience level, a list of services he can perform, and a "Contact Us" section. Often, there are some static educational materials or newsletters about financial products and perhaps a calculator or two.

A better approach is to make the site all about the client or prospect. To accomplish

this, the producer should consider the kinds of financial concepts he can feature on the site that not only will educate

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clients but also will engage them in a compelling story or message about solving an important financial need.

What's a Financial Concept?

A financial concept, as we will define it here, is a dramatic (compliance-approved) multimedia presentation on

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a major financial issue facing clients and prospects. The concept, when presented in an interesting and persuasive way, motivates the prospect to act. It is not a story about how to buy the least expensive term insurance. It is a message that illustrates clearly the importance of either a product concept or financial challenge. For example, how can clients solve their 25+ years in retirement dilemma? How can they achieve their most common retirement income distribution goals? How can the producer help them:

- Make their money last through 25 or more years in retirement?
- Produce a reliable, inflation-adjusted income?
- Remove investment fear from the planning process?
- Take out the emotional roller coaster ride from investing?
- Create a legacy for heirs if the income is not needed or used?

If the producer focuses on these major problems facing people already in retirement and those approaching retirement, and offers not only compelling stories but also solutions, then this site goes well beyond the traditional brochure ware. Furthermore, if the concept is used throughout the producer's marketing and sales activities and materials, such as in seminars, print pieces, and client sales presentations, there is the powerful potential for up-selling and cross-selling across product lines and throughout the client base.

In fact, Internet technologies can make it easier than ever to create the kind of dynamic multimedia, motion graphic stories to which clients and prospects have become accustomed in this age of DVDs, high-definition television, and video-on-demand. An original multimedia consumer sales presentation establishes the emotional connection between the individual viewer and the financial risks faced, enabling the viewer to assess the problem in personal terms.

This reaches prospects at a different level than the usual financial services content can, and it creates an urgency to act, positioning the agent as the key to solving the prospect's problem.

The producer doesn't have to go it alone. There are strategic marketing firms out there that can offer him a variety of multimedia tools and presentations. His challenge is to find a firm that has the financial know-how to create original, compliance-approved content combined with cutting-edge Internet technology and motion graphics expertise. It is not enough to approach a video company because the content is the key to success. Most of these firms don't have the experience in financial services to create clear, concise, and interesting stories that also pass the muster of the strictest compliance departments.

Create a Virtual Sales Assistant

After the producer has determined the various concepts on which his site will focus, he has a unique opportunity to turn his site into a “virtual sales assistant.” Highly successful producers tend to be focused people. They usually specialize in certain markets, products, or concepts, and they can communicate that expertise in a sincere, clear manner to clients and prospects.

How can the Web site expand the producer's competencies across other products or concepts? By letting a series of multimedia client sales presentations do the “heavy lifting.”

For example, what if the producer's focus usually is on life insurance concepts and needs, but he wants to cross-sell more annuity products? If the Web site has the proper materials and stories on it, these presentations can allow the producer to be equally competent in both arenas. This is because the sales presentations do the major work in educating and motivating the viewers. And the site works 24/7, always is competent, and doesn't require a salary or benefits. Again, as long as the producer focuses on solving the problem or challenge using these tools, he will have the competitive advantage over producers who continue along the same old path.

Real Examples of Success

It all might sound too good to be true: the producer's own branded Web site that actually affects his sales success. Does it really work?

Gregory P. Durette, of New Bedford, Mass., is one professional who has experienced great success with his Web site.

“My firm primarily is a P&C insurance shop where we are actively developing and growing a financial services division to expand our offerings to our clientele,” Mr. Durette says. “Before putting up my current site, our annual sales of life and fixed annuity products might have reached \$50,000. Over the past three years,

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however, that number has increased to \$3 million in sales. I credit the Web site for much of our success.”

Mr. Durette uses his site as an educational tool for clients and prospects to review before they sit down and discuss a customized solution with him. “I insist that prospects and current clients watch the multimedia presentations on the site prior to a face-to-face consultation with me,” he explains. “The presentations

are so well-done and professional that after clients view them, they are better educated. They get a good sense of which product seems right for them and are much more comfortable when we put together the appropriate plan.” For Mr. Durette, the Web site helps speed the entire sales process while providing a valuable educational component to his relationship with clients.

Frank Revellèse, a nearly 30-year veteran of the life insurance and financial services business based in Natick, Mass., uses the multimedia presentations on his Web site as part of the sales process. “After I meet with clients, I refer them to a specific presentation on the Web site to review at their convenience,” he says. “After they view these materials, I usually am well on my way to making a sale.” In fact, Mr. Revellèse believes that 50% of his sales are “confirmed” by the Web site, meaning that the clients and prospects view the materials on his site for information and education.

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In one case, Mr. Revellèse met with a client about an equity index annuity (EIA) product and then asked her to view the 12 minute show on his Web site, which she agreed to do. They also agreed to meet the follow-

ing week to discuss her thoughts. The next morning, an e-mail came from the client saying, “Let’s not wait.” This resulted in an \$80,000 premium EIA sale. In addition to supporting his sales effort, Mr. Revellèse believes a Web site keeps the adviser at the forefront of the sales pack. Also, if the site is not tied to a particular carrier, the adviser presents a more objective image to the client.

Gene Bresnahan, EA, CLU, ChFC, CSA, is the CEO of TaxJockey.com. He specializes in tax preparation and IRS representation. In addition, he has an adviser-branded Web site that includes various information and multimedia client presentations on life and annuity products that he offers as a link to clients from his primary site. “I have found that if I can help my clients with their financial product needs, I can be even more effective with their tax preparation and counsel,” he says. “When I am involved in the front end of these product decisions, I also am better able to con-

sider all of the tax implications at the same time.” This is particularly important when he gets IRA or Section 401(k) plan rollover cases.

In a case involving the conversion of an annuity contract to a life insurance policy, Mr.

Bresnahan was able to save a client \$100,000 in taxes, create an estate, and generate \$37,000 in commissions.

He says that his adviser-branded site has enabled him to expand client services because much of the impor-

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tant product and marketing materials and illustration capabilities are available on his site. “The site is a door opener that helps me coordinate my clients’ tax strategies with the appropriate investments, annuities, and life insurance products,” he says.

Conclusion

These examples illustrate three successful financial professionals using their personally branded Web sites in different ways to build their businesses. Just as important is the ability of the Web site to help expand the producer’s business and enhance his image.

The promise of agent-branded Web sites that support sales, educate clients, and create a competitive advantage can be delivered. It requires a distinct approach, however, that centers on financial concepts, client solutions, and engaging, interesting stories and materials. The site must be welcoming and easy to navigate.

With a keen focus and the right tools, your Web site can make you stand out from the crowd.



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